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## UT students are researching ideas for **Waller Creek**

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Anupama Atluru won't be a University of Texas student when the area around **Waller Creek** enters its renaissance. But she will be able to come back as an alumna and say she and five fellow undergraduate marketing students helped plan the redevelopment in downtown Austin.

At the request of Austin City Council Member Sheryl Cole, the students are surveying their peers and faculty members to find out what type of development they would like to see along the creek after the work on a

\$124 million tunnel removes more than 28 acres of land from the floodplain.

"The impact that (the **Waller Creek** project) is going to have on the university is going to be great," Atluru, 20, said. "It's pretty cool for us to be able to be involved in such a long-term project and actually developing the vision for this area."

The **Waller Creek** project has long been in the works, stalled by rising costs. But it finally got off the ground last year when Austin joined with Travis County to share the cost of the tunnel that will carry storm water to Lady Bird Lake. The design of the tunnel is being finalized, and crews could break ground in 2010.

Now, the city is turning its attention to the master plan for the areas along the creek. And that's where the students come in.

The tunnel inlet will be at Waterloo Park, which is adjacent to the southern edge of the UT campus. Whatever develops along the creek, be it a park or a commercial district with shops and restaurants, students, faculty members and even football fans will be within walking distance.

"**Waller Creek** runs directly through the university, and the success of the project is going to require student and faculty involvement," Cole said.

The students, all seniors in lecturer Ben Bentzin's strategic marketing class, decided to tackle the **Waller Creek** research for their final project.

"It was very new to us and sounded very interesting, the fact that we would get to help the city," said Courtney Kirkpatrick, 21.

To do that, the students have been meeting with city staff members to learn about the plans and the costs and doing research about similar developments, including San Antonio's River Walk.

In mid-November they launched an online survey and spread out across the campus to distribute 4,000 fliers encouraging people to go to the Web site. They will present their results to Cole, city officials and their classmates in the coming weeks.

Chase Leshin, 23, said that it seems like students are interested in a mix of natural areas, shops, restaurants and bars.

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Though they have received feedback from people who want exclusively natural areas or more commercial areas, neither opinion has been overwhelming.

The students know that their research is just one piece of the public opinion the city will solicit from the community in drafting the **Waller Creek** master plan.

"It's going to be interesting to see the final product in several years," Leshin said.

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